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### **VIDEOTAPE IMPROVES RURAL COMMUNICATIONS IN INDIA**

by T.E. Voigt

Video and radio are two powerful communications media which, when backed up by the right people, can transform a community. The small village of Taprana in northern India, for example, is pervaded by a feeling of pride these days, where once it was looked down on by neighbouring villages. It now has two thriving cooperatives -- a dairy and a mushroom operation. And rickshaw pullers own rather than rent their vehicles.

The catalyst for this development was videotape. Like its sister technology, radio, videotaping has been used successfully in a number of rural projects in the Third World.

In the case of the dairy, discussions among neighbouring farmers already involved in a cooperative were videotaped to spark the interest of Taprana's villagers and to provide the necessary know-how. The tapes focused on issues of quality control and pricing, as well as the iniquitous relationships with milk pedlars who pay a token sum for village milk, then water it down and sell it.

For this video technique to be an effective teaching aid, says Don Snowden, a development educator at Memorial University in Canada, who led the Taprana project, it is essential that the people on tape be the viewers' peers. They should look the same, live in similar circumstances, and use the same dialect.

"With any technology, you must have very good resource people working on the ground with the farmer if you hope to have any success at all," he adds.

Video and radio are expensive media, often cumbersome, and usually alien to a community. As a means of communication, they are also less community-oriented than traditional drama, puppets, flannel display boards or street theatre. Yet the Indian video project has been successful.

Jointly sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada, it began with a phone call from the National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI) in India. A scientist there had heard of his work with video in the Canadian North and requested help in reaching isolated Indian farmers with video equipment already in stock at NDRI.

The technology coincided with what Snowden had used when he first experimented with video; his method uses animators to help community members identify and discuss their own problems.

The NDRI agreed that the project should go beyond animal production to include other concerns of the villagers. Another plus, says Snowden, was that the Institute had the two kinds of expertise essential to this kind of project.

"I have always believed one has to make a clear distinction between technical people and animators," he explains. "Technical people are not good animators. It requires cooperation between a minimum of two people -- one who understands village education and the village situation, and another who understands the equipment."

He found both at NDRI. The head technician of the Institute went to Taprana with a community worker. During the day they taped activities and in the evening played it all back.

"There were hundreds of people sitting in front of the video," Snowden remembers. "They were in the one neutral place in the village, just a bare area where all the people pass through. Right away, the experience was not

threatening. Indeed, it was joyful. Many of the villagers had never seen a moving image, let alone a moving image with anybody they knew on it."

After this initiation to the electronic world of video, the people then watched a more specific tape from another village. This was followed by a discussion on how they themselves might use video.

The first village video program was unrelated to dairying. It recorded conversations with rickshaw pullers who needed to borrow from the Bank of India. Prior attempts had gone nowhere.

Community workers videotaped the rickshaw pullers explaining why they felt they met the bank's loan criteria. They played it back for the local bank manager, who replied on tape that he had "learned a great deal" and invited the rickshaw pullers to see him... Now, for the first time in Taprana, pullers own their rickshaws and all but two of the loans have been fully repaid.

The rickshaw-financing scheme encouraged the villagers to use video to launch the cooperative dairy. That success, in turn, led to the formation of the mushroom-growing cooperative.

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